

Only Links to U.S.

When Fat Hit Fire in Grenada, Ham Operators Were Cooking

By BILL CRAWFORD

William Miller, of Fairfax Station, Va., an Association member, was on the air when all hell broke loose.

United States military forces had invaded Grenada only two days after a terrorist wheeled a truck loaded with explosives into the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, killing 256.

"Is anybody there?" Miller's voice crackled questioningly, again and again.

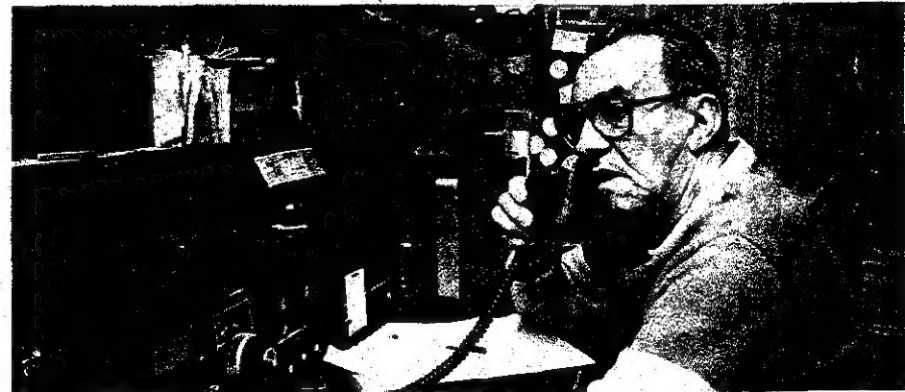
The 64-year-old ham operator (call letters K4MM) and a few others were the only links to Americans waiting to be rescued at the St. George's Medical School in Grenada. For about 40 hours, student Mark Barettella kept abreast of the invasion with information from Miller and the State Department, which used Miller's radio to evaluate the tenu-

ous situation and follow the progress of the evacuation.

Barettella (KA20RK) had the "hot end" of the line. The student often talked beneath a table as American troops attacked the Grenadian insurgents with what Barettella described "as a tremendous volley of firepower," including missiles launched from helicopters.

As the American forces continued the assault on what had become a "tiny paradise" in another world for vacationers, the Federal Communications Commission designated emergency frequencies outside normal range for about 10 ham operators, including Miller and Ted Seely of Alexandria, Va.

A nervous world, including anxious parents of the medical students, were



William Miller of Fairfax Station, Va., about 20 miles from Washington, D.C., was one of the U.S. State Department's few links to the Caribbean island of Grenada, where American students were evacuated as the invasion ensued. The AARP member has one of the nation's most powerful radio transmitters.

awaiting the outcome of the invasion and evacuation. Seely said broadcasts from the island were jammed with messages such as "Yankee, go home," probably from Brazil and Venezuela. The suspense and drama continued as Barettella once relayed this tense message: "I'm on the floor—I can't move. The mike is on the floor." Many other ham operators were listening.

Miller was relaying messages to the State Department, and one ham operator in Miami served as a control center for parents and receivers on the island. As the evacuation began, Barettella's voice grew calm: "We're in the middle of something now."

Miller, who called it a "three-pack" day (he is a chain smoker), was on the air seconds later with the good news. "The cavalry is on the way and they are working on the release of your gear."

One ham operator in Portland, Ore., John Fallon, heard Barettella's description. "There was some kind of landing craft coming. It got so exciting—I could hardly stand it," he said.

Miller said Barettella "did a good job" after they signed off. "Going downstairs" was the happy student's last message.

Did Miller ever get excited during these transmissions? "No," he responded. "I've been in these things before."

The State Department does not have its own ham frequencies, but relies on operators such as Miller and Seely during emergencies. Miller happens to be one of their "favorites." He has one of the strongest transmitters on the East Coast.

"They know I put out one hell of a signal," he said happily in his den, cluttered with 20-year-old equipment.

Victims Can Take Heart in Minnesota

If you are a heart-attack victim in Minnesota, you are more likely to die in the emergency room than while en route to a hospital, according to one survey of Minnesota residents from 1970 to 1980.

One of the report's authors, writing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, suggested that the decline of the death rate outside the hospital was because of better emergency techniques, and speculated that the percentage of deaths in emergency rooms increased so drastically because improved emergency care is keeping patients alive until they receive treatment.

The research also revealed that patients are more likely to survive heart disease once they are hospitalized, although the success rate for men has increased much faster than the rate for women.